

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



MESSAGE FROM SDDVA SECRETARY ZIMMERMAN

Great Chapter in my Book of Life!

With pen in hand I struggle to write this, my last column as Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. Perhaps Winnie the Pooh said it best when he said "How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard."

I'm very thankful that Governor Dugaard invited me to be part of his team advocating for South Dakotans. It has been an experience and a journey that I will always treasure. Every day I was afforded the opportunity to visit with at least a dozen veterans and every day veterans' lives were augmented.

There is no mystery behind the endurance and the success of American liberty. It is because in every generation, from the Revolutionary War to this very hour, brave Americans have stepped forward and served honorably in the Armed Forces of the United States. Every one of them deserves the thanks and the admiration of our entire country and they deserve our support as they heal the wounds of war.



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MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY ZIMMERMAN (CONTINUED)

It is important to remember that no matter where or when our veterans have served, they've always served with distinction. Service to country is a bridge over which more than 38 million Americans have passed during time of war. It was built on courage, dedication and patriotism—keystones in our American way of life and we must never forget their dedication and commitment to this great country and our allies.

During my tenure with the Department we embarked on Operations RAV (Reaching All Veterans), Ketch-up, KII (Korean Veteran Recognition), Saigon, Taiwan, Whirlwind and CARS (Calling All Returning Servicemembers), and all with the mission to find and enhance the lives of our veterans. There has been no greater reward than to be able to thank veterans for their service and help resolve issues they may have been facing. There is much to commemorate, and much to be thankful for. It is true that America is strong and free. But we must never forget that we would never have come this far without the heroes we call veterans.

We also expanded many educational opportunities for our veterans, launched South Dakota Joining Forces, improved veterans preference, funded military funeral honors program, got involved with the veterans courts, designed and opened the doors of a state veterans home under budget, developed and grew a platform to work with incarcerated veterans and their families, increased awareness of homeownership challenges facing tribal veterans, and grew the benefits secured for our veterans by over 25 percent.

It's been a great journey and I am so thankful for the opportunities I have been afforded and the veterans I have met. I'm proud of and thankful for the team that I call my family; the team that has been by my side during this journey --- my wife and family, the SDDVA staff, county and tribal veterans service officers, members of the veterans service organizations and auxiliaries, staff at all of the South Dakota VA healthcare facilities and vet centers, members of the Veterans Commission and the Veterans Council. You have been and will always be the greatest partners anyone could ask for.

This journey generated hundreds of rewards as well. There is pride in developing one's character and becoming a leader, serving a cause far greater than any self-interest. In the words of Clint Black – "I'm leaving here a better man."

Signing out dear friends - My Mission is Completed (Operation MMC)!

May Peace be your gift at Christmas and your blessing all year through!

Larry Zimmerman, Secretary—South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



DEPLOYMENT CEREMONY SCHEDULED FOR RAPID CITY GUARD UNIT

A deployment ceremony is scheduled for seven soldiers with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Detachment 2, 174th Cyber Protection Team, Friday, Dec. 14, at 11 a.m. at building 802 on Camp Rapid.

The public is encouraged to attend the event as the Rapid City-based unit departs for a year-long, state-side deployment in the U.S Capital region.

The soldiers are part of a nearly 40-member team and includes detachments in North Dakota, Utah and Colorado, which focuses on protecting the nation's critical cyber infrastructure and addressing emerging cyber threats.

The team can assist local, state and federal agencies in protecting domestic critical infrastructure and to provide support to law enforcement, homeland defense, and defense support of civil authority activities in support of national objectives.

DEPLOYMENT CEREMONY SCHEDULED FOR YANKTON AND WATERTOWN GUARD UNITS

A deployment ceremony is scheduled for nearly 115 Soldiers with the South Dakota Army National Guard's Bravo Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion and 147th Forward Support Company, Saturday, Dec. 15, at 11 a.m. at the Yankton High School.

The public is encouraged to attend the event as the units depart for an eight month deployment to Europe. The units will deploy within European Command's area of responsibility in support of allied nation partnerships and regional security and stability goals.

Planned speakers for the ceremony include Gov. Dennis Daugaard and Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, SDNG adjutant general.

A community send-off ceremony will also be held for deploying Soldiers with the 147th FSC on Sunday, Dec. 9, at 11 a.m. in Watertown at the Ernie Edwards Readiness Center.

The Yankton-based Bravo Battery is equipped with the Multiple Launch Rocket System, or MLRS, and is capable of providing artillery support to a brigade, division, corps or coalition task force. The Watertown-based Forward Support Company is a multifunctional logistics unit which provides supply and maintenance support.

The units will report to Fort Bliss, Texas, to complete several weeks of theater-specific training prior to deployment overseas.

TELE-COUNSELING WITH VOC REHAB AND EMPLOYMENT

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program (VR&E) announced the ability for veterans nationwide to meet with more than 1,000 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRC) via "Tele-counseling," or virtual communication.

Tele-counseling, which is accessible on any device with a webcam and microphone, increases the VA's responsiveness to veterans' needs, reduces travel costs and time for both veterans and VRCs, and improves veterans' access to necessary VR&E services.

"We strive to provide veterans with access to personalized, interactive face-to-face care and services regardless of where they live," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "VR&E's Tele-counseling service is another example of how the VA continually modernizes in support of veterans' needs."

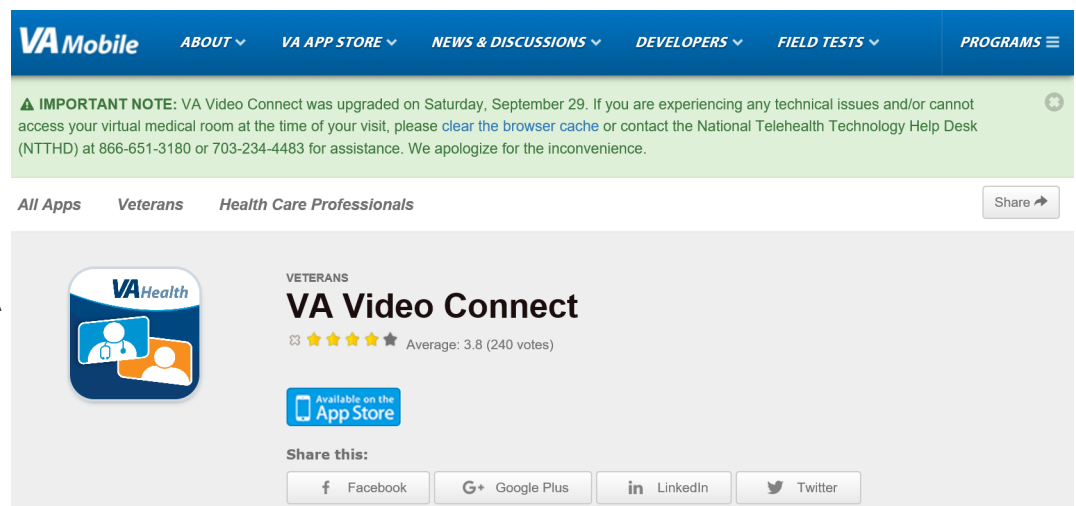
Tele-counseling allows veterans to meet with VRCs virtually through [VA Video Connect](#) without having to download specialized software or obtain unique usernames and passwords. Access to a scheduled counseling session is obtained through a unique link sent directly to the veteran and is valid for that counseling session only.

Veterans participating in most VR&E rehabilitation plans of service may use Tele-counseling and are encouraged to speak with their VRCs about it. Participation is voluntary and not required.

VR&E's updated Tele-counseling application was developed through a partnership with Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) VA Telehealth Services. VR&E recently tested the ability to use Tele-counseling during initial evaluation appointments at six regional benefits offices. This test was conducted to identify how using Tele-counseling can reduce time Veterans wait for an appointment. Best practices were identified and incorporated into the rollout of the updated Tele-counseling application.

Since 2014, over 56,000 veterans have either completed a rehabilitation plan, are employed, or have achieved a greater independence in living through VR&E assistance. The VR&E Program currently has more than 122,000 participants.

For more information about VR&E, visit <https://www.benefits.va.gov/vocrehab/>.



BIRNBAUMS RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR PHILANTHROPY

Last week, SDDVA Secretary Zimmerman presented Mike and Sarah Birnbaum with a certificate of appreciation.

Among their commitment to community, Mike and Sarah have been outstanding donors to the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home Foundation.

Retired from the SDNG, Mike has been a strong advocate for South Dakota's veterans and served on the Veterans Commission from 2004-2016, serving both Governor Rounds and Governor Dugaard.

Mike still makes numerous trips to the State Veterans Home each month to visit with our heroes.

You can learn more about the foundation at:

<https://sdcommunityfoundation.org/for-donors/find-funds/michael-j-fitzmaurice-state-veterans-home-endowment-fund/>.



CORSON COUNTY NAMES VSO

Please join us in welcoming Christen Schneider to the VSO community. Christen has been named the new VSO at Corson County. He will have the Corson VSO office open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm.

His email address is corsonvso@sdplains.com.

Previously, Loyson Carda covered both Corson and Perkins County.

SD ARMY NATIONAL GUARD TO UNDERGO FORCE STRUCTURE AND STATIONING CHANGES

The South Dakota Army National Guard will undergo unit force structure, task organization and relocation changes beginning next year to optimize its organizational readiness and capabilities to respond to state and federal missions.

As part of the reorganization, the SDARNG will deactivate three units, activate three new units, relocate six units to existing National Guard communities, and close its armory in De Smet. The majority of the changes are expected to be completed by September 2020.

The changes are a part of U.S. Army Total Force initiatives and are an evolutionary response to an ever-changing operational environment characterized by emergent threats, changing force structure to meet operational needs, and greater reliance upon the National Guard as an operational force for the U.S. Army.

"We will plan for and implement these changes to ensure we maintain a high state of readiness with the right mix of capabilities across the state," said Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, adjutant general of the SDNG. "These changes will enhance the National Guard to meet the operational demands of the future in support of its war-time mission and response to state emergencies or natural disasters."

The reorganization and relocation of units will maximize resources, training and facilities, ensure efficient mission command for operational readiness, develop more cohesive units, match units in communities that optimize recruiting demographics for future projected growth, and ensure coverage of state mission requirements.

The SDARNG will increase its overall force structure allowance from 3,012 to 3,097, adding 85 soldier positions and allowing more opportunities for people to serve.

The force structure changes include the deactivation of three units: 139th Brigade Support Battalion based in Brookings; Company A, 139th BSB in Watertown; and Company B, 139th BSB in Mitchell.

Replacing these units will be the activation of the 109th Engineer Battalion and a Forward Support Company to be based in Rapid City, and the 665th Surface Maintenance Company in Mitchell.

Scheduled unit relocations will take place for the following units:

- * 152nd Combat Sustainment Support Battalion from Pierre to Brookings
- * 115th Signal Company from Brookings to Sioux Falls
- * 155th Engineer Company from Rapid City to Wagner
- * Detachment 1, 155th Engineer Company from Wagner to Parkston
- * Detachment 1, 153rd Forward Support Company from Parkston to Huron
- * Detachment 1, 211th Engineer Company from De Smet to Madison

As part of the reorganization, some units will be task organized under a different battalion headquarters to optimize stationing proximity and ensure effective command and control for operational, administrative, training and logistical support.

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NATIONAL GUARD TO UNDERGO FORCE STRUCTURE AND STATIONING CHANGES (CONTINUED)

"We strategically position forces and capabilities in the state to maintain readiness and allow the National Guard to respond in support of civil authorities," Reisch said. "As the National Guard continues to transform now and into the future, we will meet those changing needs and determine the best composition and locations to make us as efficient and effective as possible."

The De Smet-based Detachment 1, 211th Engineer Company, will relocate and consolidate with its company headquarters in Madison. The unit armory is currently co-located with the high school and their lease with the SDARNG will be terminated. Exclusive use of the armory space will be turned over to the school district and is expected to be completed by December 2019.



While these changes will reduce the SDARNG's community presence from 22 to 21 state locations, it will not impact the organization's ability to respond to state mission requirements and support any communities.

"It is with genuine sadness that we will be relocating from De Smet - a community that has supported the National Guard in a truly outstanding manner for decades," said Reisch. "We will continue to maintain our ties to De Smet through re-

cruiting and support of community events, and there will be no change in our ability to respond to their needs should an emergency occur.

"The National Guard is dedicated to serving the citizens of South Dakota and support of all of our communities," continued Reisch. "Never in our history, have we been better trained, equipped or more heavily relied upon than we are today."



VABHHCS TOWN HALL

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs Black Hills Health Care System (VABHHCS) will host a Veteran Town Hall meeting on December 13, 2018 at VFW Post 1273 at 420 Main Street in Rapid City beginning at 6:00 pm (MT). Veterans, family members, survivors, and the public are invited to attend.

The meetings are intended to provide an open forum for VA leaders to hear directly from beneficiaries. Mr. Robert P. McDivitt, newly appointed Director of the Midwest Health Care Network is scheduled to attend the meeting.

"All veterans and their families are encouraged to attend and share their questions and concerns about VA health care and services," said Sandra Horsman, VABHHCS Director. "Town Halls are a great way to learn about what is working well and ways we can improve our services."

Beginning at 6:00 p.m., VA leaders will provide the latest updates on health care and benefits to be followed by questions from the audience.

For more information about this event, please contact Teresa Forbes, Public Affairs Officer at (605) 720-7451.

RED

Hats Off to the Hughes County employees for their support of our troops.

Decked in Remember Everyone Deployed's (RED) they are showing solidarity and support for our deployed servicemembers on Fridays.

Special thanks to Sheila Carpenter, Hughes County veterans service claims assistant, for the role she plays in garnering this great support.

A big "hats off" to SDDVA's Sheila Shaffer for working with partners in the Pierre community to garner their support and for assisting them in ordering the RED shirts.



VA HOSTS NATIONAL TELEHEALTH SUMMIT TO INCREASE ACCESS

Today, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is hosting the [Anywhere to Anywhere, Together Summit](#) at the United States Institute of Peace with the nation's top industry, government and non-profit leaders to increase connectivity and access to telemedicine for veterans.

The *Anywhere to Anywhere, Together* program fosters innovation and facilitates national, partnership-based solutions to promote forward-thinking dialogue and collaboration among world class telehealth and virtual care leadership.

"These types of events will help accelerate our shared journey to fully integrated, seamless access to healthcare no matter where a veteran resides," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Indeed, from anywhere to anywhere."

The summit focus is on significantly expanding veteran health care access by collaborating with industry partners to amplify the use of emerging technologies that best meet veteran needs. It also features discussions with nationally renowned virtual care experts, as well as demonstrations of innovative telehealth tools. In addition, VA will spotlight significant industry partnerships that will continue to transform the delivery of health care for veterans.

As the largest integrated health care system in the United States, the VA provides telehealth in over 50 areas of specialty care at more than 900 sites nationwide. The VA leads the nation in telemedicine with 2.3 million episodes of care last year. The Summit is another example of the VA's efforts to deliver quality health care to veterans where and when they need it.

Senior VA leadership and event partners from Amazon Web Services, Comcast, Deloitte, EveryoneOn, GE Healthcare, Intel, OptumServe, Philips and T-Mobile will be in attendance.

For more information visit: <https://www.va.gov/anywheretoeverywhere/>.



ANYWHERE TO ANYWHERE TOGETHER

UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec 10—Wreaths Across America Ceremony—Flaming Fountain Veterans Memorial—Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
Dec 12—VA/Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Stand Down—AJ Agard Bldg—Fort Yates—10:00 am (CT)
Dec 12—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls—Noon (CT)
Dec 13—VA/Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Stand Down—McLaughlin City Auditorium—10:00 am (CT)
Dec 13—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—American Legion Post 17—Watertown—Noon (CT)
Dec 13—VABHHCS Veterans Town Hall—VFW Post 1273 (420 Main Street) - Rapid City—6:00 pm (MT)
Dec 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—VFW—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
Dec 24-25—State Offices Closed
Dec 31—Jan 1—State Offices Closed
Jan 8—Governor's State of the State—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
Jan 13-18—VFW Accredited Service Officer Training—Annapolis, MD
Jan 18—Sioux Falls Military Appreciation Resource Fair—Central Church (Ralph Rogers Road) 10:00 am—9:00 pm (CT)
Jan 28-29—VFW State Legislative Conference—Pierre
Jan 28—VFW State Legislative Reception—Pierre
Feb 2—USS South Dakota Commissioning
Feb 8-10—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish
Mar 3-7—VFW Legislative Conference—Washington, DC
July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL



Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>

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